

**WHEN THE KERALA MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT IS HISTORICISED:  
A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**P.K. MICHAEL THARAKAN**

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Centre for Socio-economic & Environmental Studies (CES)  
Khadi Federation Building, NH By-Pass, Padivattom, Kochi – 682 024, Kerala  
Tel: +91 484 2805107, 2805108 E-mail: [cses@dataone.in](mailto:cses@dataone.in), URL: [csesindia.org](http://csesindia.org)

# WHEN THE KERALA MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT IS HISTORICISED: A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

P.K. Michael Tharakan\*

## ABSTRACT

This study indicates that the evolution of 'Kerala Model of development' was one sided. In its two momentous phases; one of commercialization of agriculture on the basis of which Socio-Religious Reform Movements emerged and the other of politicization of people's demands which crystallized in Land Reforms; it provided numerous options for social and economic advancement to the middle level caste, communities and also to the 'middle classes'. The relatively underprivileged also benefited and in their struggles for rights as well as social benefits, members of middle level castes, communities and classes participated. Such traditions are still maintained by alert and democratic mass and class movements who act as defenders of public welfare. Yet it is proposed in this study that the development experience in Kerala has resulted ultimately in weakening the material basis of public action. On limited evidence it is pointed out that the poor in Kerala society are likely to be trapped into a situation of lesser assets and relatively less incomes in the foreseeable future; thereby further increasing not only economic but also social cleavages. Such developments are likely to adversely affect the public-mindedness of even the organized sections of middle level castes and classes. It need not necessarily result in the total unmaking of the democratic and progressive traditions of Kerala's public sphere, but preserving those traditions is likely to face great pressure. It also raises doubts about exclusively entrusting the development approach so far followed, to solve problems of poverty and marginalization.

Key Words: Public action, Kerala Model, Economic Growth, Land Reforms, Underprivileged

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\* P.K.Michael Tharakan is Sri Ramakrishna Hegde Chair Professor in Decentralisation and Governance in the Institute for Social and Economic Change [ISEC], Bangalore. He is a visiting Faculty, Centre for socio-economic & Environmental Studies (CSES). He was formerly on the faculty of the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.

# WHEN THE KERALA MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT IS HISTORICISED: A CHRONOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

## Introduction

Till very recently some observers of Kerala's development experience used to feel that the State was sacrificing economic growth for social development. Such scepticism is no more valid, when Kerala's development is talked about. According to one observer, the poor has become a minority; constituting around 15 percent of Kerala's population [Nair.K.N.2004, 11-13], or even closer to 10 than 15, by now. Achin Chakraborty, on the basis of data which was presented in the Human Development Report, Kerala, 2005 [HDRK 2005 now onwards] has pointed out the strong possibility that "economic growth [was] seemingly helped by early achievements on the human development front" [2005, 541-547]. Whatever barriers that were preventing speedy economic growth seems to be broken, and the path to comprehensive and long-term development of the region seem to be apparently open.

Even those who anticipate such developments are not fully taken in by the comprehensiveness of the current growth. As it is well known among students of development, aggregate data tends to hide pockets of deprivation. Relative concentrations of poverty indicators among Scheduled Castes [SCs], Scheduled Tribes [STs], and traditional marine fisher folk and in regions where relatively more of them live, have been noted. While Kerala has managed to reduce the level of poverty among its ST population from 37 percent to 24 percent between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 [HDR, 2005, 64] the rural poverty among STs is more than two-and-a-half times that of Kerala as a whole. These groups have not been able to convert the gains made; for instance in literacy into economic opportunities like other groups could. The inability of SC and ST population to diversify their occupations leads to poverty, in terms of consumption, asset holding and housing [Narayana.D, 2003, 25-43]. In terms of the state level gender development index, Kerala is well ahead of other states. If we look beyond the state level gender development index, on several specific aspects, dimensions of well-being (on the basis of gender performance) are found questionable [Kodoth.P and Eapen.M, 2005, 3278-3286]. It is not surprising that, a recent study which explores whether high literacy necessarily translates into high status for women in the state is titled, The Enigma of the Kerala Woman, [Mukhopadhyay.S, (ed), 2007]. In other words, there are several groups of people in Kerala who may not have benefited so much from the region's general development experience.

There was a serious discussion on the higher growth rate reported from the end of 1980s<sup>1</sup>. One line of explanation indicated that the accelerated economic growth engineered by earlier investments in human development was strengthened by the market friendly policy reforms initiated all over India. Meanwhile, at least one empirical study found "that the higher growth of 1990s is based on remittance induced literacy-sector led growth" and that "there is no convincing evidence for the argument that policy reforms accelerated the productive sector of the regional economy" [Pushpanagadam. K and Parameswaran M, 2006, 81]. Further, the employment elasticity of growth in Kerala between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 was 0.013 which was the lowest among 15 major states in India [George.K.K and Tharakan.P.K.M.2004]. The low employment elasticity of growth is likely to have continued.

Whatever are the differences in interpretation of the nature and impact of growth; one factor cannot be denied at all. That is the impressively high rate of growth from the end of the 1980s which is still continuing. There are indications that it is likely to continue for a while [Kannan.K.P, 2005, 548-554]. This high rate of growth is matched by an equally impressive rate of reduction in the percentage of persons under the poverty line. In such circumstances, a straightforward assumption can be that the total elimination of poverty from Kerala society is only a matter of time. According to this assumption we have to wait only for a decade or two, with the same development approach intact, and poverty will get totally eliminated.

One cannot hold that poverty elimination will happen automatically. Once the target of total elimination of poverty is in sight, future achievements are likely to be difficult. The poor will become invisible among a broadly developed set of other people. They are likely to be scattered widely, so much so, it will be difficult to reach them through conventional poverty amelioration programmes. Even otherwise, it will be unrealistic to assume that poverty can be totally eliminated from any society. Yet the optimism raised in this regard is on the basis of the correctness of the development approach or policy that has been followed in Kerala. It resulted not only in growth of human resources but also in emigration and remittances which eventually helped high economic growth. According to some observers, the population policy followed helped Kerala to be now poised to reap benefits from demographic dividends [Kannan.K.P, 2005].

Before giving such wholesome credit to the development policy followed so far, one may have to look at the whole historical process that led to the present situation. We have to find out whether the process itself favoured some groups while marginalizing the others. Social Scientists have pointed out 'public action' as a primary force behind the so called Kerala Model [Ramachandran V.K. 1996 and Ramakumar. R.,2006] Public action means that people from different classes and social origins internalize public demands- including those emerging from the poor- and participate in struggles to achieve them, both in collaboration with the state and also through oppositional action. While V.K. Ramachandran [1996, 206-325] refers to "mass political movements", Gita Sen [1992, 276] points out that "the mechanism by which accountability got built into the system included political agitation and organization on a large scale to increase participation and access". If public action has played a role; under what specific historical conditions did it take place? Further, over time, have the conditions remained the same as to keep public action intact? In other words, whether the momentum was maintained till the present, keeping the material conditions for public action without diminishing? Only if these questions are answered and that too in a positive fashion, can one grant the prevalent development approach, the capacity to result eventually in elimination of poverty. To seek answers to these questions, one has to historicize the whole development process, or look at the dynamics of Kerala's development experience.

## I

The search for the origin of the Kerala Model takes us straight to the nineteenth century. Several distributive policy measures are seen to be operative as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century [CDS/UN, 1975.chs.V and VI and Tharakan. P.K.M. 1998]. The beginning of the availability of mass literacy, acknowledged as one of the most crucial factors promoting the particular development pattern in Kerala [Dreze. J. and Sen. A. 1995, 51] was already

visible in the southern princely states which formed part of united Kerala, as early as the late nineteenth century [Tharakan.P.K.M. 1984, 1913-28 and 1955-67]. Therefore, the search for reasons that promoted such a public policy has to be directed to the nineteenth century. Earlier studies have identified the emergence of Socio-religious reform movements [SRRMs now onwards] from almost every caste and community which mediated demand for public services and utilities at higher levels of decision making; [Tharakan.P.K.M.,1992,134-52] as one of the favourable factors. The emergence of the SRRMs have already been linked to the extensive and intensive commercialization of the agrarian economy of the region [Tharakan.P.K.M.1998]. Once we take into account the various public measures and other historical factors which helped initiate the commercialization process; [Raj.K.N. and Tharakan.M.,1983,31-90] it becomes important that we analyse public policy measures undertaken in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to locate the processes which shaped the Kerala model.

All regions roughly corresponding to present-day districts of Kerala had a literacy rate, ahead of the Madras presidency without Malabar and that of all India. In women's literacy also this was the case [Nair. P.R.G. 1981, 24, 25]. As early as 1891, and most probably even as early as 1875 the three administrative divisions into which present day Kerala was divided, had higher male as well as female literacy rates than the Madras presidency and all India [Jeffrey.R.1987,464]. Over the decades, the Malabar district of the Madras presidency performed comparatively worse off than the princely states of Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi in terms of literacy rate. In Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi there was steady increase in female literacy; with particular growth during 1911 and 1951. In 1890 the male-female literacy rates for all India differed at 17 to 1, while in Kerala [as far as it can be calculated for the region] it was only about 5 to 1. By 1951 male literacy rate was only 1.6 times higher than female literacy in Kerala. In other words, the difference between male and female rate of literacy was narrower in Kerala than in the rest of the country [Ibid. 447-472]. There were several measures taken to promote female literacy such as abolition of school fees for girls in primary schools in Thiruvithamkoor in 1896, and in Kochi in 1901 [Ibid].

There were policy measures promoting education of castes considered low in the existing social hierarchy undertaken around the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1896, Thiruvithamkoor government offered incentives for schools established for the "backward castes" [Gladstone. J.W., 1989, 271]. In 1906 primary education was made free for students from such castes, in Thiruvithamkoor which was followed in Kochi in 1909. In Kochi, the proportion of such students increased from 7 per cent in 1911 to 12 per cent in 1920 and to 25 per cent in 1926. In Thiruvithamkoor, the number of "backward caste" students increased to 16000 in 1906 and by 1910 they represented 10 per cent of enrolment [Ibid, 274]. While other policy measures left the backward groups still suffering in relation to others in terms of literacy and education, the provision of free primary education facilitated greater participation from even really economically backward groups [Nair.P.R.G. 1981, 49].

It was in 1817 that a Royal Rescript, much acclaimed in the educational history of Kerala, was issued by the then Rani of Thiruvithamkoor accepting the responsibility of the government in assisting village schools [Tharakan.P.K.M.1984, 1986]. This indicated an important departure from earlier policy by which Government support was extended only to institutions of higher learning. In Kochi the government established 33 vernacular schools in 1818 [Menon.C.A.

1955[1911] 291]. Dewan Sir. T. Madhava Rao, who played a major role in promoting 'modern' education in Thiruvithamkoor, himself admitted the fallacy of not promoting vernacular rural schools earlier [RAT; 1864-65, 46]. From then onwards increasing supply of educational facilities was reflected in high public outlays. The participation of non-governmental agencies was facilitated by the comparatively early introduction of grants-in-aid. Protestant Missionaries<sup>2</sup> who were the first to introduce 'modern' education in these parts benefited from governmental grants in starting schools and also indigenous Christian agencies subsequently [Mathew.A.1987, 99].

Education of castes considered low in relation to others was almost an exclusive preserve of missionary schools till around the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Travancore State Manual* [Aiyah, N. 1906, vol.II, 401] has pointed out that,

*So far as educational facilities were concerned, the slave or lower castes were decidedly at a great disadvantage..... On account of the prejudice and exclusiveness of caste, the government and private schools were shut against them, while the religious scruples prevented their joining the mission schools. Thus for long years they remained without receiving the rudiments of education.*

In spite of the apparent contradictory term used here, implying that the "lower castes" could not join missionary school due to their "religious scruples", other sources do suggest that throughout the nineteenth century, those from among the caste considered 'low' who sought education had to depend upon missionary schools. Reluctance of the higher caste people as well as Thiruvithamkoor Government to accord the same privileges as given to the Syrian Christians [or Christians claiming Christian ancestry from the first century onwards] to the converts; (who were mainly from the backward caste of Ezhavas and others considered to be still lower in the social hierarchy) led to the missionaries taking up their case with British bureaucrats [Jesusdas.R.N.1977, 64-73]. Though the declared policy of the East India Company was that their officers in India should not use their authority to advance the cause of conversion, influential Britishers like Colonel John Munro in Thiruvithamkoor in early nineteenth century openly advocated the cause of Protestant Christianity including the education of their converts [Ibid.523].

Conversions from among castes considered lower than others and their education under missionary auspices were not strongly interfered with by public authorities due to the general attitude held towards them by other sections of the Kerala society. Neither did the governments in the two Princely States interfere in missionary educational activities among them; since it would have provoked the displeasure of the colonial government. The following passage from one of the early historians of Kerala testifies it. He [Menon.P.S.1983,[1878]376] has said that "The Travancore Government being reluctant to come in contact with the missionaries owing to its regard for the paramount power, desisted from taking active measures". It was only in the wake of the Educational Rules in Grant-in-Aid Code of 1894-95 that the government of Thiruvithamkoor took a position different from the earlier times and established 15 schools for educationally and socially backward castes and communities like Muslims, Ezhavas, Pulayas, Marakkans and Kanis. It was followed in a year by another 15 such schools being opened. Several other incentives were provided for preparing teachers for such schools, in addition to fee exemption and special assistance for starting such schools. The Christian missionaries once again made most of such opportunities [Mathew. A. 1987, 47].

There were many reasons for such a shift of policy by the government. Robin Jeffery [1976, 81] attributes it to the government's apprehension of the danger of driving the people in the lower levels of the caste hierarchy to the arms of the missionaries. Further, after the failure of the Great Mutiny of 1857, there was a feeling even among those sections who actively resented the British domination, that a new way of social organization has become a *fait accompli* and has to be accepted. There was an occasion, before the Mutiny when Lord Dalhousie wrote a minute containing instructions to the Madras Government, to impress upon the Thiruvithamkoor Maharajah of the necessity of immediate reformation and correction of what he perceived as a disorganized state of affairs [Menon.P.S.1983 [1878], 357]. The threat of annexation implied in the consequent communication from the Governor of Madras to the Thiruvithamkoor Maharajah ceased to exist as a result of the assistance rendered to the British in facing the Great Mutiny. Soon, Sir. T. Madhava Rao, who was described by a member of the House of Commons as the "Turgot of India" who left Thiruvithamkoor "a model state", was inducted as the Dewan and he presided over a memorable period of reforms, particularly in the field of education and administration [Aiyha.V.N. 1906].

In 1904, Government of Thiruvithamkoor required another order to remove restrictions on admission of children from the Pulaya caste, considered the lowest in the caste order, to government schools [Aiyha.V.N.1906, Vol.II 489]. In 1917-18, further incentives were extended for backward caste education. In 1924-25, all schools in Thiruvithamkoor except seventeen were opened to all communities [Mathew. A 1987, 48]. In 1938-39, there were 87,841 students in Thiruvithamkoor belonging to "backward classes" of whom 59,565 were boys and 28,276 were girls. In 1946-47 there were 1, 46,632 "backward class" students of which 49,028 were girls [Ibid 49]. Meanwhile in Kochi, Education Code introduced in 1911 not only abolished fees at primary level, but also introduced scholarships to poor students [Menon.T.K.K [ed], 1932, 172]. In 1921, a Code Revision Committee recommended exemption of fees to the children of depressed classes and half fee concession to Muslims, Ezhavas and other backward classes in English schools, and recasting of scholarship rules by enlarging its scope to include girls, Muslims and other "backward and depressed classes" [Ibid.176-181]. It was noted in 1929 that [Ibid.181] "so far as boys are concerned, excepting some of the depressed and very backward communities, the state may claim to have succeeded in making elementary education well high universal without resorting to compulsion". In Malabar, there was hardly any special programme for promotion of backward caste education. This kind of education was carried on mainly by Missionaries [See Ragaviah J. 1990, ch.4] In the 1930s there were some improvements in general educational levels because of the added efforts of local bodies [Mathew.A.1987, 80-82].

What we have seen is that in early nineteenth century when 'modern' education got initiated, education of the depressed or backward castes remained neglected except by the missionaries. Even when there were some initiatives taken in this regard by governments in Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi (whose record were better than that of Malabar) their education particularly of the lowest groups did not progress at par with other castes. Two other communities also lagged behind. They were the Catholics, both Syrians of earlier vintage and Latins who were mainly successors of converts by Portuguese and other Roman Catholic missionaries; and the Muslims. The 'modern' or English or English types of schools were originally founded by the Protestant missionaries and from whom the Catholics under their own missionary leadership kept a distance. In 1834, the CMS Grammar School in Kottayam had, out of a total strength of

sixty, 41 non-catholic Syrian Christians, 17 Nairs, 1 Brahmin and 1 “Romo-Syrian” Catholic [Tharakan P.K.M. 1984, 1966-1967].

Under colonial paramountcy, a ‘modern’ bureaucracy and organized sector of the economy had evolved and jobs in this sector were granted on the basis of educational qualifications. Thus, modern education became a major asset. This was realized at first by the non-Catholic Syrian Christians along with perhaps the Tamil and Maratha Brahmin communities in Thiruvithamkoor and Kochi. Protestant Christians or those Christians who came into contact with Protestant missionaries (in this specific case the non-Catholic Syrian Christians) were way ahead of Catholics in literacy and education. The Catholics were considered to be most backward in educational development [Philip.E.M. 1908, 404]. *The Census of Travancore* itself noted that the “Romo-Syrians and Mussalmans may be said to occupy a mediocre station in life” [RCT 1875, 708]. This difference by Christian denominations is explained on the basis of Protestantism’s link to literacy via the vernacular Bible as against the Catholics who preferred catechisms (or collection of prayers to be by-hearted) to Bible-reading and its interpretation. Rare exceptions to this observation can be seen in regions like Lutheran Germany. Yet holds good for almost all parts of the world [See Gawthrop.R. and Strauss. G. 1984, 31-55 and Eisenstein. E.L.1979]. It was reported that the contact with missionaries instilled ‘spiritual fervour’ in the non-Catholic Syrian Christians [Abraham.E.C.1966, pp.110]. Regular Bible reading was introduced among them by the missionaries. Reading of Bible certainly required literacy. The comparative backwardness of Catholics, [who were not in close contact with English/Protestant missionaries] in education was a recurring theme in speeches delivered at the inaugural meeting of the Travancore-Cochin Roman Katholica Mahajana Sabha [TCRKMS] in 1905. Maliammavu Kunju Vareed, one of the speakers pointed out that “those missionaries who can claim to share the religion of the imperial royal family had instilled amongst the Protestants a desire for education, while the Jacobites following their example could arise in various walks of life much higher than us” [Nazrani Deepika, 1905]. Both factions of the Syrians-Catholics and Jacobites joined together to form an organization called Nazrani Jathya Aikya Sangham [NJAS] with clear intention of educational advancement. The attempt proved abortive, alleged to be mainly due to the hostility of the Catholic missionaries who were not English [Nidhiry, A.M. 1971]. The Jacobites organized themselves under joint stock company rules into Mar Dinoysius Seminary [MDS] and pursued their educational objectives independently [CSF 3322, 1898] As a result, their lead in education was maintained and in 1916 resulted in the following statement [Thoma Kattanar, 1916, p21],

*it is well known that among the Syrians; the Romo-Syrians are, on the whole, richer as a body than the other sections and that the richest among them is the Parayil family. But among the Puthencoore (non Catholic) Syrians of Travancore the richest family is that of the above contributor [Kulangare Veedu of Parur]. Further, while the Parayil family has no scion who has distinguished himself in higher English education, this contributor is a graduate in Arts and Law*

Even in spite of such initial handicap, the Syrian Catholics made great strides in education by early twentieth century. Therein lies a point of great significance to the analysis that we are making. Suffice it to say that by 1932 the Catholics-both Syrian and Latin factions of the same denomination- were managing the larger number of private schools in Thiruvithamkoor [Mathew. A. 1987, 168]. What is to be noted is that between the two factions there were still great

unevenness. The Latin Catholics (among whom the Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal and elsewhere were working from around the beginning of the sixteenth century) lagged clearly behind the Syrians in terms of schools and students. It was noted that while Latins had no schools in 1879, by 1906, they had only 3 high schools, 35 English and Vernacular schools and 285 'pariah' schools, besides being involved to some extent in girls' education too [Tharakan.P.K.M. 1984]. By this time Syrian Catholics were far ahead. The educational backwardness of the Latins still persist. Considerable numbers of them are traditional marine fisher-folk. They are among one of the least literate groups within the highly literate Kerala society [Narayana.D. 2003, 28].

It is intriguing that while one faction of the same religious community, the Syrian Catholics could, over time make up their initial handicap and advance in literacy, the other faction which could have benefited from the same policy measures available at least in the two princely states, failed to do so. In this context it is important to recall that Robin Jeffrey [1987] had invited attention to the fact that the Protestant missionaries had invested a higher amount of money and effort in the Tamil district of Tanjore than in Thiruvithamkoor. Yet, it is found that educational and literacy advancement occurred more in Thiruvithamkoor than in Tanjore. There is reason to believe that the demand for education was the stronger factor in Thiruvithamkoor than the supply of educational institutions [Tharakan P.K.M. 1986]. As it has been argued elsewhere [Tharakan P.K.M. 1984] the rise in demand for education has been linked to the more intensive as well as extensive commercialization of the agrarian economy of Kerala in general and of Thiruvithamkoor in particular. If the Latin Catholics, within such a context of relatively high demand for education did not succeed in advancing educationally, then the reason may be that the factor generating such demand did not favourably affect that particular community. Even later developments do indicate that Kerala benefited generally from an agrarian strategy of development which pushed out the traditional marine fishing community to be "outliers to its central development tendency" [Kurien J. 2000]. Meanwhile the Syrian Catholics were in the mainstream of agrarian development, including that of 'cash crops' cultivation. As it has been noted earlier [K.N.Raj and Tharakan. P.K.M, 1983, P-42],

*by the early 1930s, most of the area in the largest-sized holdings on dry land is likely to have been owned by relatively affluent Christians having close association with trade (and often industry as well). There is evidence that land transactions in the following decade also moved in their favour. Even in the case of wet land a high proportion of the area in the largest-sized holdings in Travancore was probably land reclaimed from backwaters (in Kuttanad) and leased in by Christian entrepreneurs from Namboodiri landlords for a highly capitalist form of paddy cultivation.*

They were able to generate demand for education which they identified as a means of social advancement. In mediating their potential demand into actual attainment their own SRRM led by outstanding leaders like Nidhirickal Mani Kathanar [1842-1904], [Tharakan P.K.M. 1992] played a major role.

Talking of SRRMs and the role they played in promoting and effecting social indicators of development, the example of the Sree Narayana movement, inspired by Sree Narayana Guru, [1854-1928] the most outstanding social reformer that modern Kerala has seen, cannot be left out.[Issac.T.M.T and Tharakan P.K.M. 1986]. This movement, though it had

wider scope than the advancement of the Ezhava caste to which the Guru belonged, worked mainly towards the improvement of the Ezhavas, a caste considered “backward”. Though the Ezhavas had relatively less material resources to back up their development efforts, they managed to do spectacularly well in terms of educational and other forms of advancement, mainly due to certain economic situations evolving favourably to them [Jeffrey R.1981, 1974].

Around 1870, some of them acquired English education, though till the turn of the century, admission to government schools were effectively denied to them [CSF 3234, 1895, p.2]. Two of them, brothers, Dr.P.Palpu and Rao Bahadur P.Velayudhan had acquired higher education too. Dr.Palpu took the lead in submitting two mass memorandums from the Ezhavas, one in May 1895 submitted to the Dewan and the other to the Maharaja in September 1896 [CSF 1231, n.d., Ravindran.T.K. 1980, p.27]. Both are known as Ezhava Memorials. The memorandums among other things, requested for admission into government schools and for government jobs for Ezhavas. Palpu also organized a society called the Ezhava Mahajana Sabha [EMS] in 1896 [Sanoo M.K. 1976, p.170, Jeffrey.R.1974, p.46-8]. It had only limited response from the Ezhava masses. It was only with the advent of a new organization called the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam [SNDP] in 1903, that the Ezhava efforts at social reform and their demands for social upgradation reached its fullness. Due to the outstanding personal charisma of Sree Narayana Guru, the SNDP under his guidance became a vanguard organization attracting several Ezhava-based groups, not only in Thiruvithamkoor but also in Kochi and in Malabar [Rao.M.S.A, 1981, p. 202, Sanoo. M.K. 1976, p.269]. The Guru's exhortation was not for mere educational advancement but was a message of liberation from the caste system. For challenging the existing caste hierarchy he recommended education as effective means. The message of the Guru had a special simplicity, which was communicable to even the most simple-minded. In an enquiry into the material conditions which promoted a renaissance mood among the Ezhavas (and which made them highly responsive to Guru's teaching), the link with increasing economic prosperity among some sections of the Ezhava community, becomes clear. Several factors such as varied occupation and being associated with the production and processing of coconut products, for which by late 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were considerable demand in the world market, helped in the process. There were attempts to reorganize the system of inheritance which resulted in the *Ezhava Regulation of 1927*. The Regulation streamlined family organization and kept family property intact though subdivisions were allowed [Ittycheria. M.V.1927]. Yet it will not be possible to equalize the Ezhava SRRM with economic development alone. There were other favourable factors such as their relatively 'advantageous' social position compared to castes considered the lowest. The Ezhavas had some amount of control over social resources like formal knowledge and skills for artisanal production besides control over at least 'Verumpattom' land; even in the traditional society. This gave them an advantage in advancing effectively their demands for social upgradation including for education.

Another community which could have benefited from commercialization and SRRMs were that of the Muslims. This community remained backward in literacy in all the three administrative divisions of Kerala. In 1891, the *Travancore Report of the Census* [TRC1891] had the following to say about the community,

*The Mohammedans are the most obnoxious of all people to the influence of civilization. In all the English schools of Travancore, there are only 33 Mohammedan pupils for a population of 158828*

or 1 in 4800, if we take the total number of Mohammedans "learning" (5,826) into calculation, the proportion is 1 in 27. The Madras Administration Report, 1890 gives 76,678 Mohammedans scholars to a total population of 2,250,386 or 1 in 29.

In 1905, there were suggestions in the Thiruvithamkoor Assembly to introduce, like it has been done in British India, a financial encouragement to promote Muslim education [PSMSMPA of T, 1905, 71]. In spite of all these, the general literacy level of Muslims in Kerala as a whole did not rise in a comparable rate with those of forward castes and Syrian Christians or of Ezhavas. Even in a study conducted in connection with the mass campaign for literacy, in 1989-1990, they were, and specially among them Muslim women were found to be backward in literacy [Tharakan P.K.M. 1990, 24-25].

Here the point is not the lack of social reform. The Muslim community in Kerala had its own share of social reform. Among them the best known are those led by Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi [1873-1932] [Tharakan P.K.M.1992] and the one led by Sanaulla Makthi Tangal [1847-1921] [Fasal C. 2005]. The organizational efforts associated with the Moulavi were marked by several influential publications; which were the carriers of reform ideas among the community. Among them was the historic *Swadeshabhimani* started in 1905, under the editorship of Ramakrishna Pillai, and which bore the caption of "the only Mohammedan organ in Travancore and Cochin" [VFMT, 1988]. To influence the Muslim masses who had very little knowledge of the Malayalam script, the Moulavi in 1918 started a journal called *Al-Islam* in Arabic-Malayalam script; along with another journal called the *Deepika* Moulavi influenced the Education Department to teach Arabic in schools. This attracted some Muslim students to general schools. *Swadeshabhimani's* early issues have several articles on Muslim education. Moulavi himself used to write on educational advancement achieved by Muslims in North India and countries like Egypt, and also brought out the poor educational standards of Muslims in Kerala. He even published an article entitled "Nammude Sthreekal", openly advocating women's education in the *Al-Islam* in 1918 [Kalyani Amma.B.1988.App.I, 343-47]. The leadership and guidance that the Moulavi offered through the organization called *Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangham* [KMAS] was accepted by many other organizations like *Chirayinkil Taluk Muslim Sammelanam*, *Lejnthul Muhammadiya Sangham*, Alleppy, and *Muslim Aikya Sangham*, Kodungallur [For details see, Kabir.M. 1994, pp. 107]. Yet their collective efforts did not seem to have had a great effect upon Muslim education until after Independence. The Muslim's resource position as a community was not far different from that of the Ezhavas who made remarkable educational progress. Therefore the comparative failure of Muslim education may be related to the level of cultural differences imposed on them by other long standing reasons. This requires special analysis.

As far as the castes considered low in southern Kerala were concerned, there were two movements of significance in the nineteenth century. They were the movement for abolition of slavery [Kusuman K.K.1973] and the struggle for the right to wear upper clothes for women from among them [Jesudas R.N.1975]. Both these movements had great significance. They were both supported and to some extent influenced by missionaries. Two economic developments of the same period also went a long way to better the conditions of life of these castes. One was the opening up of plantations [Tharakan. P.K.M. 1998, Tharian G.K. and Tharakan. P.K.M. 1986, Kooiman D. 1989] and the other was

the beginning of Public Works Department [PWD] [Mohan P.C. 1983, Jeffrey R. 1976, 30-1]. These developments opened up alternate job opportunities for them. Most of such job opportunities in the PWD went to the Ezhavas. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the activities of the Basel Mission in starting industrial units seems to have provided similar opportunities in Malabar [Raghaviah.J. 1990].

In such a background, a movement was initiated under the leadership of Sri Ayyankali [1863-1941] who was by all accounts a remarkable personality of great charisma and organising ability [Chentharassery.T.H.P. 1979, (ed) 1991]. He defied the existing caste order by asserting the right of persons considered to be from lower castes to travel on public roads. He also questioned the practice of them being served tea separately in tea shops; and that too in earthen-ware pots and coconut shells. He organized attempts to break the tradition of Pulaya women being allowed only necklace of cheap stones. He asserted the right of women from such castes to cover the upper part of their bodies. Around 1914 the predominantly agricultural labourers belonging to the Pulaya caste boycotted work in paddy fields under the leadership of Ayyankali, with the demand that their children be admitted to public schools [George A. 1990, 18-19].

Sri Ayyankali and his followers for a while worked along with a preacher of Hindu Dharma called Sree Sadananda Swami, and the organization that he founded. The organisation was called *Brahma Nishta Madom Samghom*. Soon the two parted company and in 1907 another organization was formed with Ayyankali as Secretary called the *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham* [SJPS] [Chentharassery. T.H.P, 1979, 49, 63]. It is quite notable that while the movement parted company from a Hindu religious organization, it never attempted conversion to Christianity as a means of social uplift. That he was clearly against conversion came out emphatically in his speech on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1923, to the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha, the Legislative Assembly created in Thiruvithamkoor and to which he was nominated as a member [Ibid. 91-3]. It should also be noted that Sri Ayyankali's new organization consciously adopted a caste free term or a name that cut across specific caste terms and addressed all poor or *Sadhu Janam*.

Under the banner of the SJPS and its organ the *Sadhaujana Paripalini* and using his membership in the legislative body, Sri Ayyankali fought for various issues. It was under pressure from the SJPS that the Government allowed admission of children of lower castes into government schools. On 4-3-1912 he pointed out that only seven schools in Southern Thiruvithamkoor were admitting Pulaya students<sup>3</sup>. On the same day, he demanded that at least the concessions granted for Muslims who according to him were better off than the Pulayas, be granted to the latter. On 26-2-1924 he pointed out how on flimsy reasons Pulaya children are being denied admission. On 22-2-1915 he demanded appointment of a committee to study the difficulties faced by his people in education and to suggest solutions for them. He wanted a responsible officer of the education department and a representative of his community in that committee. On 24-2-1917 he demanded scholarships to Pulaya students and training in Science, Agriculture and Industry for Pulaya teachers. On 2-3-1920 he pointed out that the difficulties faced by Pulaya students in paying fees as lump sum. In this context he wanted Pulaya children to be asked to do labour in industrial units as part of their education, so that they will have means of livelihood also. On 27.2.1922 he pointed out that among the roughly 3 lakh Pulayas only 12,381 were attending schools. Among them only 136 were studying above the level of 5<sup>th</sup> standard.

Among them only five or six were able to pass in public examinations. The reason for such a plight was their inability to pay fees and difficulties to have mid-day meals. Therefore he pointed out the need for arranging mid-day meals for children of Pulayas and Pariahs. On 2-3-1920 he demanded that primary education upto 4<sup>th</sup> class be made compulsory for Pulayas.

The most active period of SJPS was between 1913 to 1931 when it was specially active in the taluks of Changanassery, Thiruvalla and Kottayam, literal 'gateways' to Kuttanad, the premier rice-bowl of Kerala where large number of Pulayas were employed as agricultural labour. There was another organization in Thiruvananthapuram started by converted Christian leaders like V.J. Thomas Vadhyar and Harris Vadhyar; working against untouchability. They also eventually joined the SJPS [Chentharassery.T.H.P.1979, 63]. Though members of the Pulaya caste dominated the ranks of SJPS from its beginning it was not till the 1930s an exclusively Pulaya organisation. By 1938 it had reached a situation in which only Pulayas were members. It got transformed to the *Akhila Thiruvithamcore Pulaya Maha Sabha* under the leadership of T.T Kesavan Sasthri, son-in-law of Ayyankali. Soon several groups got themselves organized on the basis of specific caste loyalties such as *Thiruvithamcore Paraya Maha Sabha*, *Sidhanar Service Society* and *Sambavar Mahasabha* [Ibid. 192]. There were several such specific caste based organizations emerging from castes from lower rungs of the social hierarchy. *Cheramar Sanghatana* was formed under the leadership of Pampadi John Joseph in 1914. Enos Vadhyar formed the *Inavar Mahajanasabha* and Kuravas under the leadership of Varkala S.K. Raghavan formed an organization called *Sathya Vilasini Sangham* in 1928 [Ibid.172].

Among such organizations special mention should be made of the *Prathyaksha Reksha Deiva Sabha* [PRDS] which was formed in 1910 under the initiative of Poykayil Yohannan who later on came to be known as Kumara Guru Devan [Chentharassery.T.H.P.1983]. Though he started public life as a preacher under Christian missionaries, Poykayil Yohannan soon carved out an independent identity for himself and his people. He was also nominated as a member of the Sree Moolam Praja Sabha where he raised problems of castes considered low in the social hierarchy. He demanded that three acres of land along with agricultural credit should be distributed to every household of the former 'Slave castes'. His demands were seldom for any specific *Jati* (Caste) [Sanalmohan.1994, 6]. What is significant of the case of the organization that he initiated was that it tried to break the *Jati* fold and to introduce new categories; including a project based upon the 'humanity of the oppressed slaves of Travancore'. Slavery was theorized and not *Jati* [Ibid.34] though Poykayil Yohannan and his organization worked broadly within a Christian discourse, they had definitely broken away from largely specific Christian traditions. After the founder's death in an oracle speech 'he' is supposed to have said that, [Ibid. 36].

*I made you one caste, who had been drawn from various castes, and established a church for you. That is the seat of those who do not have caste, and group rivalries. Henceforth you will be known in a new name, that's what Johannar community is. The state and the government could recognize you in that name.*

Later Yohannan's alias Kumara Guru Devan's wife Janamma announced that the organization that he founded and referred to as the Johannar community is a Hindu sect, in a public meeting attended by Mannathu Parmanabhan and

R. Shankar, well know leaders of other community-based organizations and who were at that specific period, leading the *Hindu Maha Mandalam* [Ibid.36].

These significant organizational developments from among the lower rungs of society had set backs in terms of their original purposes. Yet some sections of people who participated in such efforts and their successors had an extension of their organized presence through politically oriented movements subsequently. Until the late 1920s and early 1930s, options in terms of independent political organizations were not available to the most underprivileged, particularly the landless agricultural workers. The gains made through missionary interventions and organizational efforts led by Sri Ayyankali and Poykayil Yohannan remained partial. But in the late 1920s there was a significant shift in socio-economic conditions at least in Kuttanad, the major paddy producing region of Southern Kerala. There, the existence of *Kayal* or shallow backwater cultivation on reclaimed land, became mechanized by the adoption of diesel and electric pumps. This promoted the use of casual wage labour in the place of widespread bonded labour; a form of labour deployment which had replaced the former 'slave' labour [Jose A.V. 1980, 58-72]. The relative 'freedom' allowed under casualisation to the labourers is to be seen within the larger context of commercialization tendencies operating in the economy. The existence of extensive *Kayal Krishi* or paddy raised on reclaimed shallow backwater itself was a major sign of such tendencies [Pillai.V.R. and Panikar P.G.K., 1965]. Apart from paddy there were several perennial and other crops like coconut, pepper, spices and plantation crops, grown commercially in all three parts of Kerala, particularly in its southern parts [Raj.K.N. and Tharakan.P.K.M.1983, 38-39].

What prompted the Princely states to follow a policy in favour of cash crop cultivation? As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in these regions, administrative powers got centralized around 'Kingship' of Rajas. In this process the "tenants" of the old system, or persons belonging to the middle level of the agrarian hierarchy proved to be of immense help to the kings or Rajas in the consolidation of power. Ever since that, one can easily detect Princely states following a consistently pro-tenant policy which led to the emergence of land and credit markets [Varghese T.C. 1970]. Agricultural promotion was inherent in such policies and it was used to achieve greater production from which the 'tribute' demands from the paramount power could be met thereby preventing any serious inroads into the limited autonomy granted to the Rajahs by the British [Tharakan.P.K.M.1998]. Making use of the opportunities provided by such significant economic changes, a section of the middle level castes and communities who also held middle level positions in the agrarian hierarchy, could rise up economically. When their new found economic prosperity contradicted their relatively lower social status, they became ardent supporters of social reforms [Tharakan.P.K.M.1992].

What is seen here is that in these far reaching changes which occurred in the Princely states of Kerala, the castes at the lowest levels of the social hierarchy, who were mainly agricultural labourers, do not figure at all. Since they were not land-owning castes, they could not have benefited from commercialization of agriculture. It was evidently through commercialization that the middle-level castes prospered economically and became stake-holders in social reform. Almost all the immediate benefits, including those negotiated by the SRRMs, went largely to the middle-level castes and communities including the lower middle caste of Ezhavas. Of course, later on very limited benefits were spun off in favour of the agrarian labour. Organizing themselves on trade union lines and with clear political purposes, following

the unionization efforts initiated in industrial centres like Kollam and Alappuza by Congress Socialists and Communists [George. J. 1984, Jose A.V. 1977], they were able to consolidate certain gains like wage increases, protection from atrocities etc. These gains are to be seen in the context of linking up between movements of the same nature in South and North as well as the strengthening of the movements for tenurial reforms.

The socio-political movement initiated by the Communist party all over Kerala region had two major slogans around which popular mobilization was achieved. They were, one, for comprehensive land reforms and the other, for united Kerala. Both these slogans had an appeal cutting across class differences. As some observers felt the Communist party in Kerala emerged from something akin to a social movement [Desai.M 2003]. One reason for such an observation may be that. Almost all Malayalam speaking people were apparently interested in the slogan of United Kerala. Similarly, even substantial tenants were interested in land reforms because they stood to gain from measures to endow ownership rights over tenant lands. While the united state of Kerala was formed in 1956, the Agrarian Relations Bill which initiated the process towards comprehensive land reforms was passed in 1959 and was eventually implemented from 1970[Raj .K.N. and Tharakan.P.K.M.1983]. The land reforms, an important legislation for social change, seems to have failed in fully satisfying the basic needs of the lowest castes and communities. They were mobilized along with other groups around the demands for land to the landless. The demand was put across as the right of landless agricultural labourers to have ownership over their homesteads. The other land reform measures included abolition of tenancy and imposition of ceiling on land holdings. The granting of homestead rights were fairly well implemented. While in 1964-65, thirty three percent of rural labour households were absolutely landless, in 1983-84 their percentage share had shrunk to less than seven [PPC D SC ST, 2000, 17]. The limited gain in terms of homesteads increased the labourers' collective bargaining capacity which resulted in a better real agricultural wage rate too [Raj.K.N. and Tharakan.P.K.M.1983, 77]. The gain in terms of land and consequent additional income seems to have also worked in favour of acquiring educational facilities. The Malabar region, where there was greater distribution of homestead rights and which lagged behind other regions in terms of percentage of enrolment (in schools) to total population, caught up with the rest by 1979-80 [Nair. P.R.G. 1983]. This could have, by adding incentives for more intensive cultivation of these homestead sites, directly made a favourable impact upon their nutritional status too [Panikar.P.G.K and Soman C.R. 1984, 47].

A village-based study in 1986-7 in the former Kochi state, [Franke.R.W, 1992] while bringing out several gains of land reforms, also has the following to say,[p.88,90]

*the households in the top landholding quartile were the major losers of land; these were the high-caste landlords... The redistribution of rice land appears to have benefited mainly those in the second to fourth land holding quartiles... (as far as house compounds are concerned) the lowest quintile...received very little. Households in that category were mostly agricultural laborers living on small hillside plots in the outcaste, or untouchables colonies on the edges of the village. These plots became theirs, but few coconut, mango, (and) other trees will grow there. Thus, the statistics on the land reform do not fully reflect the continuing poverty of the resources of this poorest group.*

It further says [p.92] that “the middle households got most of their income increases from the land reforms. But those in the bottom division benefited only by receiving title to their garden lands, which ... are not always productive. Most of the redistribution in this bottom division probably came from wage increases”. It has also been pointed out that [p.101] “the farmers hold land of substantially higher quality than do the laborers or agricultural laborers” and that “land reform transferred only minimum house compound benefits to the poorest groups”. Another interesting village study, this time from North Malabar and from 2000-1, argues in favour of what has been pointed out by Tharakan [2002, 358] that the allotment of homestead land to the poor is very significant [Ramkumar.R, 2006, 318-336]. According to this study “among agricultural workers in the village studied the shift in the pattern of land ownership came along primarily due to the policy of distributing homesteads land as part of land reforms”. What it found was that the “average net income from homesteads supplemented the incomes of manual labour households involved in agricultural wage work considerably.” Though the study found “the absolute level of income-poverty” in the village still high, “income-poor households enjoyed higher levels of standards of living”. The study concludes that such a transformation of socio-economic conditions was brought about through “public action from above and below”.

If the labourers ended up with such significant but nevertheless (in asset and income terms) limited gains, the tenants in general gained much more in comparison. The abolition of tenancy-a legal form of occupation-resulted in relative gains for the tenants [Herring R. 1990]. Not only did the tenants acquire substantial portion of land but—which was expected of the reforms-also they acquired additional maneuvering strength which could have helped them to thwart the other measures of land reforms that of imposition of land ceiling. The implementation of ceiling and take over of excess land and its redistribution seems to have suffered quite a bit. Both the village level studies referred to earlier agree with this finding [Franke, RW, 1992, p. 85, Ramkumar R. 2006, p.310]. In addition, there were further amendments attempted whereby a significant portion of surplus land could still be diverted [Tharakan.P.K.M.1982, 146-163]. Though this particular amendment was later withdrawn, the fact that such amendment could be attempted do show the power and influence the former tenants (and current substantial landholders) have acquired over the system of political decision making in the state.

What is significant about the picture drawn here is that while there has been redistribution of power, influence, opportunities and wealth from the highest level of the former agrarian hierarchy (the *Jenmies*), which largely coincided with the highest in the caste structure, to the middle level of both agrarian and caste/community structure. But such redistribution has not happened in the same manner further down. Those who gained from progress which happened in early twentieth century in education and other social indicators are predecessors of the main gainers in terms of asset-redistribution through land reforms. With control over assets, particularly the most important asset of cultivable land, they are able to convert it to further social and economic advancement through education and other means. Education in Kerala was viewed primarily as an instrumentalist process even earlier. Education was a means to acquire organized sector jobs and thus ensure social uplift. With landed assets at their command, (through land reforms) parents from the middle class and middle caste (former tenants) ‘directed’ their children into those educational courses which would fetch an immediate and high social and economic return. On the other hand those who belonged

to the lowest levels of society did not gain much assets which could have been converted into further social and economic advancement.

## II

One might point out that the situation described in the preceding section is wholly expected. Besides, it covers the story only partially. What is presented so far is a review covering only two-but nevertheless significant-factors; education and land reforms. Education is important because of the special role it has played in the history of the development experience in Kerala [Tharakan.P.K.M.1984]. It is also important because it has been hypothesized that education will influence how well the poor are able to participate in new areas of economic activities which require skills [Dreze.J.and Sen. A. 1995]. The review attempted to reveal the problems faced by people belonging to castes and communities considered low in the social hierarchy in attaining a position comparable to that of others. The Scheduled Caste persons by now have almost bridged the gap in the matter of literacy; but not the Scheduled Tribes [PPCDSCST 2000, 20]. More disturbing is the fact that the higher the SCs and STs go in the educational ladder, they have to face larger and larger failure rates. Of 100 SC students who enter the class one, only four are able to study upto the 12<sup>th</sup> class [Ibid.22]. This means that not only does the difference persist but also a significant number of SC and ST students are practically shut out of higher learning. Based upon the estimate of literacy in marine fishing villages in Kerala in 1981, it has been pointed out that while all Kerala had 85 percent literacy, fish workers had only 66 percent [Kurien.J. 2000, 187]. The reasons why the students from the fishing community are unable to compete with others are the inadequate conditions for successful schooling, such as lack of funds to buy books and clothes and poor facilities for study at home, including parental attention [Thomas E.J. 1989]. A more recent study revealed that the major factor prohibiting ST students from performing well in school is the lack of a conducive home environment [Tharakan.P.K.M. et.al.2007]. They are exactly the same as the factors that Sri Ayyankali spoke about in the case of Pulayyas in early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The landless agricultural labourers were mobilized along with the tenants in the movement for land reforms. Some of their felt demands for ownership right over *kudikidappau* land was highlighted by the movement. Their organization and mobilization had far reaching socio-political impact upon Kerala society. They could no more be evicted from their homestead. They could (even on the small pieces of land that they got) create additional income. Landowning gave them a new sense of confidence and could use it for effective bargaining for better wages and working conditions. While they got strengthened as a 'class' through land reforms, they also got weakened on another front. Their weakness came about in comparative terms. Land reforms with abolition of tenancy as its principal strategy strengthened the former tenants. With the advantage that this 'group' had already gained through social reform movement and commercialization of agriculture, they were in a pre-eminent position to convert their newly acquired assets into advantages on more than one front. The idea that the former tenants should have been strengthened in comparison with the former landlords was a good one, both on economic grounds and from the point of view of social justice. But the strengthening of former tenants adversely affected the agricultural labourers with whom they were placed in a conflictual situation immediately after the land reforms. Having been confronted with a strongly unionized

labour, the former tenants cut down on agricultural work and shifted land use to less labour-demanding patterns. It has been pointed out elsewhere that “the success of land reforms...has produced new tensions...where once the poor were pitted against the rich, now the poor are pitted against the slightly less poor” [Franke.R.W, 1992, p.113]. With the middle class and the middle level castes and communities gaining further educational advancement, a considerable number from among them migrated outside Kerala for employment and eventually sent back remittances. The remittances played a not-so-small part in the development of demand for real estate. The former tenants could still benefit from the real-estate demand while the agricultural labourers who were shut out from land gifts from land-owners were generally denied any role in land-market due to high prices. Therefore their ability to make benefits out of a boom in land market was constrained. As a result the social cleavage between the landless (or nominal landholders) and the landed persons is likely to have increased.

Meanwhile, the need for land among the marine fisherfolk remained different from the mainstream agrarian groups. They did not want land so much for agricultural purposes. They required coastal land for habitat as well as specific requirements related to fishing like drying of marine products and upkeep of fishing gear including boats and country craft. None of these issues was even discussed while the land reforms were formulated, thereby resulting in an effective break in the development of another important group in Kerala society. The plight of Scheduled Tribes whose land was alienated by different means, need not to be repeated here. Their initial asset position was so weak compared to mainstream social groups with whom they had to deal and ‘compete’. A recent study [Jose-Kjosavik.D and Shanmugaratna, 2007, 1184, 1253] has come to the conclusion that,

*the indigenous communities [in Wayanad/Kerala] got marginalized through various historical process, and the marginalization was manifest in the loss of property rights in land and forest through statisation and privatization, which triggered and reinforced other process of marginalization, [whereas] it could be presumed that these communities have been largely self-sustaining, and their economy was embedded in social relationships meant to ensure security for all members of the community.*

It is no wonder that they along with the Scheduled Castes are found to concentrate among persons below the poverty line [Narayana.D. 2003, 39]. A recent primary survey undertaken by the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishat [KSSP] [Kerala Padanam, 2006, 86-87] has indicated that land holding is being transferred over the last five years from the socio-economically poorest groups to the richest. The net flow of land transfer was towards the richest group which forms 8.8 per cent of the population from the three groups who are economically below them. This, along with the situation of professional and higher education (revealed by the same survey, p.74-75) shows gloomy prospects for SC and ST communities in Kerala.

## **Concluding Remarks**

What is indicated by such a review is that, the evolution of the so-called Kerala Model itself was one-sided. In its two momentous phases; one of commercialization of agriculture on the basis of which SRRMs eventually evolved and politicization of people’s demands which crystallized in land reforms; it provided many options for social and economic

advancement of the middle level castes and communities and 'middle classes'. It is not that the underprivileged did not gain at all. It was mainly through struggles based upon the growing consciousness of rights among the relatively underprivileged that the access to basic services was made possible for wide sections of Kerala population. In these struggles, the better-endowed classes and social groups also participated through the SRRMs and political movements and many a time played leading roles. The combined and persistent popular pressure emanating from such struggles forced the state and other public-decision making bodies to resort to various programmes of granting rights as well as welfare measures. Therefore the public action-based argument to explain the development experience in Kerala, is feasible. There is much truth in the statement of Ramkumar, (2006, 339) that "The achievements...are remarkable...because the gains were preserved over time (and) the credit goes to sustained public action". He also has, quite correctly pointed out that,

*Kerala's society is marked by the presence of democratic political regimes that work towards the welfare of the poor. It is also marked by the presence of an alert citizenry; mass organizations, mainly from the Left that represent people of different backgrounds consistently strive to protect institutions of public welfare from degenerating.*

But it is proposed here that the resultant development experience itself resulted in weakening the material basis of public action by creating further social cleavages.

The argument is not that there is a one-to-one relationship between the material basis and the tradition of public action which was maintained on its basis. On the other hand, there is a growing physical and social separation between even the lower middle class/castes and the poor groups, which has all the indications of growing further in the future. The poorest are "doomed" to send their children to certain type of schools, and get education in a way which will not guarantee a ready and well paid job subsequently. Meanwhile even their slightly better-off neighbours are able to send their children to another type of schools to get the type of education that they provide which has better chance of getting better-paid jobs. In almost all other areas of public services such differences are strengthening over time. This phenomenon is based upon the attainment of redistributed assets by different groups, which was lop-sided.

Such differences are likely to affect the mass organizations which were guardians of public welfare. In an earlier period of the history of development of Kerala if the demands of the poor could be internalized by other social groups, it was based upon different forms of shared experiences such as being educated together, and treated for illness together etc. In the enfolding scenario, the public institutions that provide such services are themselves differently organised. The access to those which are considered "better" among them are growingly determined by higher assets and income. Though on limited evidences, the preceding review had pointed out that the poor in Kerala society are likely to be trapped into a situation of lesser assets and relative incomes even in the future. These developments are likely to adversely affect the public-mindedness of even the organized sections of middle level castes and classes. It need not necessarily result in the total unmaking of the democratic and progressive tradition of Kerala's public sphere; but preserving those traditions is likely to face great pressures.

**NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> Other contributors to this discussion include, Pillai.M.and Shanta.N, 2005, Subramaniam.K.K. 2005, 2006, Oommen.M.A. 2005, Jeromi.P.D, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> All Christian-run schools in Kerala were never exclusively missionary schools. Indigenous Christian groups were also interested in education for reasons different from those of the missionaries.

<sup>3</sup> The source for this and the other speeches of Sri Ayyankali is Girijalmajan . S. 1991, 65-80.

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